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TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#) [ISRAELI](#) [SOCIETY](#) [ECONOMY](#) [AND](#) [FINANCE](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAELI PROFESSOR HOPES GOI DEVELOPMENT PLANS WILL HELP BEDOUIN

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Gene A. Cretz for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: A Ben Gurion University professor working closely with the Bedouin community in the Negev discussed the GOI development initiative for the Negev, still a concern for the Bedouin. The professor said he is putting together a plan which will bring the GOI and the Bedouin leadership together to collectively address the GOI economic initiative for the Negev. This will ensure that Bedouin concerns are addressed as the GOI moves ahead to develop the Negev, the BGU professor said. He also talked about his recent visit to the U.S. which allowed him to raise money for Bedouin youth development. Several philanthropists donated USD 50,000 to bring together youth from several Bedouin villages for summer activities to create the venues for Bedouin youth to learn about coexistence, community activism and leadership. END SUMMARY.

Preparing for Further Development of the Negev

2. (C) Econoff met with Dr. Thabet Abu Ras, a professor at the Ben Gurion University in the Negev July 1. Abu Ras told Econoff that the GOI plan to develop the Negev remains a concern for the Bedouin. He said he hopes that the GOI does not ignore this minority group as it plans for Negev development. Abu Ras is planning to survey the Bedouin community regarding the GOI's Negev economic initiative. This survey will provide the Bedouin leadership with a tool for assessing community needs, he said, and will be used to formulate an agenda for discussion with GOI officials. Israeli officials charged with handling Negev projects can then work with the Bedouin leadership to ensure that the Bedouin are not left behind, said Abu Ras.

3. (C) Abu Ras said his survey package will focus on assessing the major needs of the Bedouin community, such as identifying alternative settlement areas with more space -- very important to the Bedouin. He said basic services and infrastructure needs, such as sewage, water, electricity and also roads will be covered in the survey. Abu Ras said Bedouin recognized and unrecognized villages alike have inadequate services and infrastructure and "these are the current problems" facing the Bedouin. Existing recognized villages are like "dormitories," he said, offer very little to the Bedouin, and clash with their traditional lifestyle.

4. (C) After he submits the survey results to the Bedouin leadership, Abu Ras said, he will put together a plan with them to address socio-political issues of concern to the Bedouin by bringing to light questions of land settlement, land ownership, education, employment, civil rights, and citizenship. Abu Ras told Econoff that the Bedouin want the GOI to respect them and "treat them as equals." Demolition of homes, uprooting of crops and empty promises, he said, only escalate the already tense relationship between the GOI and the Bedouin.

5. (C) The GOI views the issue of demography as a major problem because of the ever increasing population of the Bedouin, asserted Abu Ras. There are those in the Bedouin community, he said, who actively engage in marrying more than one partner and having many children, to "spite" the GOI in its efforts to address Bedouin population growth. This "spite" he says motivates the Bedouin to actively increase their numbers, noting that to the Bedouin the GOI only seems concerned with the needs of the Negev's Jewish residents and not the Bedouin residents.

6. (C) In a related development, several hundred Bedouin from the Negev demonstrated July 7 to reportedly protest the GOI's distribution of 160 demolition orders of houses in the unrecognized village of Be'er Al-mashash in the Negev.

U.S. Jewish Communities Fund Summer Camp for Bedouin Youth

7. (C) Abu Ras shifted the discussion to his recent trip to the United States, during which he raised 50,000 USD for the Bedouin community in the Negev. He said these funds, which were donated by Jewish communities in the U.S., will help pay for a summer camp for 1,500 Bedouin youth from seven

different schools in the Beer Sheva region. The camp will provide Bedouin youth the opportunity to attend recreational classes and participate in outdoor activities. The camp will also help Bedouin youth channel their energy, the professor commented.

18. (C) Abu Ras said the camp will focus on team building exercises and other classroom activities which will help increase their community awareness. He said trips to Tel Aviv and other parts of the country will be in the curriculum, providing Bedouin youth lessons in coexistence. The Israeli NGO Shatil was instrumental in helping to raise the U.S. funding, said Abu Ras. He said his counterparts in the U.S. have promised more assistance in the future.

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